7 Critical Issues Facing Today’s Camps

Prepared by:
Cait Wilson, ACA Research Assistant
University of Utah
Background

Every 3 years, the American Camp Association® (ACA) collects emerging issues data from camp staff who respond voluntarily to an online survey. Because this survey was voluntary, it represents the experiences of those who responded to the survey. However, it does provide insight into enrollment trends that might affect the camp industry as a whole.

Additional resources can be found on the ACA website under the Research tab. The articles on emerging issues will appear September/October in Camping Magazine.
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**Camp Professionals Responded**

- 334

**Sample Represents ACA’s Camp Population**

- 48% Residential Camps
- 23% Day Camps
- 25% Day and Residential Camps
- 3% Rental Groups

**Respondents Were...**

- 66% Camp Director or Owner
- 16% Organizational Executive
- 13% Administrative Staff
- 5% Other

- 5% Government
- 11% Religious
- 16% Agency
- 21% Independent For Profit
- 42% Independent Not-For-Profit

**Administrative Staff**

- 66% Camp Director or Owner
- 16% Organizational Executive
- 13% Administrative Staff
- 5% Other

**Other**

- 5% Government
- 11% Religious
- 16% Agency
- 21% Independent For Profit
- 42% Independent Not-For-Profit
### TOP 7 EMERGING ISSUES for 2017

Respondents ranked these common concerns in the following order:

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**#1 HEALTH AND SAFETY**
- Mental, Emotional, and Social Health
- Increased medical needs

**#2 STAFF TRAINING & RECRUITMENT**
- Recruiting qualified staff

**#3 PARENT COMMUNICATION**
- Registration, Health and Safety Messages, etc.

**#4 DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**
- Recruiting diverse campers and staff, catering to diverse needs, program design, etc.

**#5 REVENUE GENERATION**
- Identifying new revenue sources and being fiscally responsible

**#6 MARKETING**
- Competing with other youth programs, innovative marketing tactics, and promoting the value of camp

**#7 EVALUATION OF CAMPER OUTCOMES**
- Measuring camper growth
Mental, Emotional, and Social Health (MESH)
Staff and campers are dealing with MESH issues (e.g., depression, anxiety, and eating disorders). About 71% of camps say MESH is an issue.

Medical Needs
Staff and campers have unique medical needs (medications, allergies, etc) that need close monitoring. About 45% of camps have issues with managing these unique needs.

Security and Intruders
Camps (42%) are more concerned with trespassers, intruders, and strangers.

Emergency Protocols
Camps are increasingly concerned about protocols for emergencies (e.g., active shooter, wild fires, and wild animals). About 18% of camps have issues preparing for weather-related emergencies.

Resources to check out:
"MESH Proactive Camps: What are their secrets?"
"Medication Management"
"Emergency Preparedness"

Check ACA’s resource library!
71% of camps reported a lot more or slightly more issues with mental, emotional, and social health (MESH) than the past.

Emerging Issues

- **55%** of camps struggle with training staff to address camper MESH needs.
- **45%** of camps have problems managing unique camper medical needs.
- **50%** of camps have difficulties providing diverse food options.
- **42%** of camps have issues with preparing for intruders.

**MESH Issues Compared to Past**

- A lot More
- About The Same
- Slightly Fewer
- A lot Fewer
#2 ISSUE FOR CAMPS

## STAFF RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

### Finding Qualified Staff

Many camps (65%) have issues with recruiting quality and specialized staff (e.g., nurses). There is increased competition from college internships.

### Supporting Staff With MESH

Half of camps have seen increases in mental, emotional, and social health issues such as anxiety and depression among staff. More residential camps said MESH was a major issue.

### Encouraging High Quality Work

About 48% of camps have issues encouraging high quality work amongst staff.

### Managing Negative Staff Behaviors

Camps (35%) have had issues managing negative staff behaviors (e.g., entitled attitudes, lack of work ethic, lack of respect for authority, misrepresent the camp around town, and instances with alcohol use).

### Resources to check out:

- "3 Reasons to Choose a Job at Camp Instead of a Summer Internship"
- "Camp Belongs on Your Resume: Highlighting the Professional Development Value of Working at Camp"
STAFF RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Issues for Camps

- **38%** of camps have an issue training staff to prevent and address bullying.
- **29%** of camps need help with training staff about diversity and inclusion.
- **20%** of camps have issues with training staff to prevent and address issues with sexual violence.

Topics ACA suggests addressing in staff trainings:

- **BULLYING**
- **MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SOCIAL HEALTH**
- **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**
- **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**
#3 ISSUE FOR CAMPS

PARENT COMMUNICATION

Messaging Parents
Camps have difficulties effectively communicating with parents (e.g., registration, regarding camper health, and during emergencies).

Overprotective Parents
Parent's are overbearing when it comes to their children (e.g., programming, contacting their children, and unique medical needs).

Registration
Camps struggle communicating with parents for registration (e.g., filling out documents correctly and giving medical records).

Resources to check out:
"Camp Staff: Getting Health and Safety Messages to Stick"
"Talking with Parents about Protecting Their Children at Camp This Summer"
Only 27% of camps have strategic goals related to diversity that are a high priority.

### ISSUE FOR CAMPS

#### Finding Diverse Staff and Campers
- 32% of camps indicated they face challenges recruiting diverse campers and 52% face challenges recruiting diverse staff.

#### Providing Financial Support to Campers
- About 40% of camps struggle providing financial support to campers.

#### Staff Training
- Camps (29%) have issues with providing adequate training opportunities for staff to promote equity and inclusiveness.

#### Evaluation of Diversity and Inclusion Efforts
- Half of camps evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts towards diversity and inclusion.

### Resources to check out:

- "Attracting Diverse Staff & Campers"
- "20/20 Toolbox: Scholarship, Fundraising, and Outreach Strategies"
- "The Inclusion Audit: Evaluating Your Camps' Efforts to Include Diverse Populations"
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Issues for Camps

58% of camps said yes they have strategic goals that focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity.

53% of camps struggle to find staff to meet their diversity and inclusion goals.

40% of camps have an issue providing financial support for campers.

30% of camps have a problem enrolling campers to meet their diversity and inclusion goals.

29% of camps need help with training staff about diversity and inclusion.

Diversity Strategic Goals

Yes, and a high priority
Yes, but not a priority
No, but considering
No, not a priority
Increases in Operating Fees
Camps had increases in operating fees (e.g., wages, maintenance, and rent). About 52% of camps indicated it was a priority to decrease expenses.

Finding Innovative Ways to Generate Revenue
Camps struggle to find new ways to generate revenue. Some camps have started to place more of a priority on renting to outside groups (38%), adding capacity through capital projects (34%), and extending the season (23%).

Reduction in Enrollment
The majority of camps (75%) think increasing enrollment in a priority. An issue for camps occurs when enrollment decreases.

Pricing
Camps (45%) are not sure how to price their registrations to generate revenue while not being too expensive for parents.

Resources to check out:

"The Dollar$ and Cents of Operating a Camp"

"Show Us The Money!"

"Fundraising Strategies"

Continuing Education Credits
Revenue generation initiatives that are a priority

Camps are looking for ways to generate additional revenue.

- **Increase enrollment**
- **Increase donations**
- **Add new programs**
- **Decrease expenses**
- **Rent to outside groups**

Issues for Camps

- **75%** of camps think it's a priority to increase enrollment
- **61%** of camps think it's a priority to increase donations
- **52%** of camps think it's a priority to decrease expenses
- **52%** of camps think it's a priority to add new programs
Many camps have an issue with developing and using innovative marketing tools to reach new target markets.

Market the Value of Camp
Camps have difficulties marketing the value of camp to parents (e.g., camp as an opportunity for growth and development).

Differentiating Camp From Competitors
Camps struggle to market against competitors (e.g. youth sports and other camps).

Affordability of Marketing
Camps indicated they have tight budgets and do not have enough funds to market camp effectively.

About 71% of camps said it’s more of a priority to improve marketing efforts.

Resources to check out:

"Social Marketing: Where Should You Start?"

"Marketing the Value of the Camp Experience"

"Search Marketing on the Web — Drive New Camper Enrollment and Alternative Businesses"
Camps want to improve their marketing efforts.

### Promotional Materials
- 90% of camps purchase promotional materials

### Video Production
- 42% of camps purchase video production services

**Bar Chart:**
- **Y-axis:** Improve marketing efforts
- **Categories:**
  - More of a priority
  - Somewhat more of a priority
  - A priority, but no more no less
  - Somewhat less of a priority
  - Not at all a priority

**Legend:**
- Blue: More of a priority
- Purple: Somewhat more of a priority
- Pink: A priority, but no more no less
- Light Purple: Somewhat less of a priority
- Grey: Not at all a priority
#7 ISSUE FOR CAMPS

EVALUATION OF CAMPER OUTCOMES

About 87% of camps said evaluation is very important or critical to their camp.

Finding Time to Do Evaluations
Many camps (65%) said a major challenge they face when conducting evaluations is finding the time to collect, analyze, and disseminate data.

How to Use Evaluation Results
About 40% of camps indicated they weren't sure how to use evaluation results for positive change.

Dealing with Negative Results
What if we find out something bad about our camp? Camps (28%) were worried how to deal with negative results from evaluations.

Buy-In From Front-Line Staff
One in four camps struggle with getting front-line staff to help facilitate evaluations.

Resources to check out:

"Why Evaluations Are Awesome: Cool Tips for Using Camp Evaluations to Make the Good Better and the Better Best"

"ACA Youth Outcomes Battery"

"Research 360"
EVALUATION OF CAMPER OUTCOMES

What helps support your camp’s evaluation efforts?

- **56%**: Supportive organizational culture
- **43%**: Knowing how to use the results
- **40%**: Knowing how to conduct evaluations
- **36%**: Finding time to collect data

Camps mostly use online surveys (72%), observation (70%), and paper surveys (67%) when evaluating their programs.
FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

AMERICAN CAMP ASSOCIATION

Research Team

Laurie Browne, Ph.D.
Director of Research
lbrowne@acacamps.org

Deb Bialeschki, Ph.D.
Senior Researcher
dbialeschki@acacamps.org

Cait Wilson, M.S.
Research Assistant
cait.wilson@utah.edu